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**SOUTH BAY
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The Last Roundup

By Andrea Renskoff

Kidding Around in the Kitchen

Young Chefs Find a Recipe for Fun at Local Cooking Classes

Does your child yearn to learn the art of creating the perfect soufflé? Or perhaps you're just hoping to nourish your child's appreciation for good food by getting them into the kitchen.

Thanks to chefs on the Food Network and educational programs in schools, parents have a renewed interest in teaching children about food, nutrition and cooking. With childhood obesity and skyrocketing diabetes in the news, it makes sense that empowering kids with knowledge about cooking will help them make better choices.

"It's more than just about food," says Richard Klein, owner of Chefmakers, which offers cooking classes for kids. "It's also about manners, kitchen safety, etiquette and nutrition." It was Klein's own two children who inspired him to offer these programs. "If you get the child involved with the actual planning and doing, they take pride in the food, and they'll eat it," he says.

And holiday time – while parents are planning big family meals and spending more time in the kitchen – provides the perfect recipe for sparking your kids' interest in cooking.

The following is a sampling of cooking classes for families and children in the Southland.

Chefmakers Cooking Academy

Chefmakers is a school dedicated to budding chefs of all ages. The Family Fun series puts kids and adults together for one-session classes, such as bread baking, holiday workshops and Sunday brunches that start with a trip to a local farmers' market. Ten-session classes include Mommy, Daddy & Me, Preschool Prodigies and Kids in the Kitchen. Teens get their own workshops and classes, such as Cooking For College.

Kitchens With Class

"You Do Pilates While Your Kids Cook." Yep, that's the name of the class at Creative Space. After a day of work or running around, you make time for yourself with a Pilates class while your kids prepare and eat a nutritious and fun dinner. The kids get exposure to cooking and foods from around the world, and you get to tone your body and relax. Classes are for a parent and children ages 3 and up. Price is \$560 for everyone per 14-week session. Creative Space is at 11916 W. Pico Blvd., L.A. Call 310-231-7600, www.creativespaceusa.com.

Gelson's Markets and Sur La Table shops periodically run one-session classes for kids. Go to www.gelsons.com and www.surlatable.com for information.



Kids can spice up the holidays with a cooking class at such Southland culinary schools as Chefmakers.

Chefmakers also offers winter-break, spring-break and summer cooking camps at two Southland locations.

Details: Classes offered for ages 3 and up. Cost: \$55 to \$400. 872 N. Via de la Paz, Pacific Palisades, and 451 Manhattan Beach Blvd., Manhattan Beach. Call 310-459-9444, www.chefmakers.com.

Let's Get Cookin'

At Let's Get Cookin' Westlake Culinary Institute, the parent-child workshops (recommended for ages 6 through 12) offer sessions devoted to a particular theme. The team might create "A Menu From *Charlotte's Web*" or "The Big Kahuna Barbecue." Teen Cuisine nights for ages 10 to 16 have included "A Passion For Pizza" and the "Los Angeles Subway Series," featuring ethnic foods from different neighborhoods.

Let's Get Cookin' owner Phyllis Vaccarelli hopes students come away with "very basic skills and excitement about preparing food at home." She began these programs back in 1984. "I thought it would be a fun thing for kids to do," she says. "But now it has become a lot more crucial. Fast food has taken over, and I think people can cook a lot better at home." The two-part gingerbread house workshop is a good class for the holidays.

Details: \$60 to \$160. 4643 Lakeview Canyon Road, Westlake Village. Call 818-991-3940, www.letsgetcookin.com.

Ritz-Carlton, Huntington Hotel and Spa

For the aspiring pastry chef, it doesn't get better than puttin' on the Ritz. One Saturday per month, the Ritz's pastry chef Brian Sundeen takes students ages 7 to 12 into the hotel's pastry kitchen for a tour and safety lessons. Then they learn about working with recipes, baking techniques and pastry presentation as they prepare a selection such as crème brûlée, strawberry shortcake or Halloween candies.

Chef Sundeen sees this as a way to build confidence and offer encouragement to children who may already be interested in pursuing a culinary career. And he wants all children to see that cooking is fun.

Details: \$50 (call early; classes often fill up). 1401 S. Oak Knoll Ave., Pasadena. Call 626-568-3900, www.ritzcarlton.com/hotels/huntington. ♦

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